

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for brokering food order transactions among a plurality of unaffiliated sellers, comprising:

one or more databases containing:

5 delivery information associated with each of a plurality of buyers;
availability information identifying food items available from each of a plurality of unaffiliated sellers;

pricing information for the food items available from each seller; and
10 delivery information for each seller comprising a delivery area for the seller and substantially real-time delivery time information for the seller based at least in part on a current order backlog for the seller; and
a food order transaction broker operable to:

receive a request for at least one food item from a buyer;
15 generate a list of one or more sellers of the requested food item according to a comparison of the requested food item with the availability information for each seller and a comparison of the delivery information for the buyer with the delivery area of each seller, the list reflecting the pricing information for the requested food item for each listed seller and the substantially real-time delivery time information for each listed seller; and

20 initiate a food order transaction concerning the requested food item with a particular listed seller selected from the list.

2. The system of Claim 1, wherein the buyer delivery information is selected from the group consisting of a buyer area code, a buyer city, a buyer zip
25 code, and a buyer street address.

3. The system of Claim 1, wherein the pricing information for at least one of the food items reflects a currently available special offer for the food item.

4. The system of Claim 1, wherein the substantially real-time delivery time information for at least one of the listed sellers comprises an estimated delivery time determined based on one or more actual delivery times for the listed seller within a predetermined time period preceding the request.

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5. The system of Claim 1, wherein the substantially real-time delivery time information for at least one of the listed sellers comprises a recent actual delivery time for the listed seller.

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6. The system of Claim 1, wherein the broker is further operable to rank the listed sellers according to at least the substantially real-time delivery time information for each listed seller.

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7. The system of Claim 1, wherein:
the one or more databases further contain preference information for the buyer; and

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the broker is operable to generate the list according to the preference information for the buyer, the list excluding any sellers for which the pricing information or the substantially real-time delivery time information does not satisfy the preference information for the buyer.

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8. The system of Claim 1, wherein the broker is further operable to communicate to the buyer a suggested alternative food item available from one or more of the sellers, along with the pricing information and substantially real-time delivery time information for the alternative food item for each of these sellers, if the substantially real-time delivery time information for one or more of the listed sellers exceeds a threshold.

9. The system of Claim 1, wherein the availability information for at least one of the sellers comprises substantially real-time availability information reflecting a current shortage of one or more food items normally available from the seller.

5 10. The system of Claim 1, wherein:
the one or more databases further contain rating information for one or more of the sellers; and

the broker is further operable to communicate to the buyer the rating information for at least one listed seller in association with the pricing and
10 substantially real-time delivery time information for the listed seller.

11. The system of Claim 1, wherein the broker is further operable to:
communicate the list to the buyer;
receive from the buyer a selection of a particular listed seller; and
15 initiate the food order transaction with the particular listed seller in response to the selection.

12. The system of Claim 1, wherein the broker is further operable to select the particular listed seller automatically according to at least the substantially real-
20 time delivery time information for all of the listed sellers.

13. Software for brokering food order transactions among a plurality of unaffiliated sellers, the software being embodied in a computer-readable medium and when executed by a computer operable to:

receive a request for at least one food item from a buyer;

5 access one or more databases containing:

delivery information for the buyer;

availability information identifying food items available from each of a plurality of unaffiliated sellers;

pricing information for the food items available from each seller; and

10 delivery information for each seller comprising a delivery area for the seller and substantially real-time delivery time information for the seller based at least in part on a current order backlog for the seller;

generate a list of one or more sellers of the requested food item according to a comparison of the requested food item with the availability information for each seller and a comparison of the delivery information for the buyer with the delivery area of
15 each seller, the list reflecting the pricing information for the requested food item for each listed seller and the substantially real-time delivery time information for each listed seller; and

initiate a food order transaction concerning the requested food item with a
20 particular listed seller selected from the list.

14. The software of Claim 13, wherein the buyer delivery information is selected from the group consisting of a buyer area code, a buyer city, a buyer zip code, and a buyer street address.

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15. The software of Claim 13, wherein the pricing information for at least one of the food items reflects a currently available special offer for the food item.

14. The software of Claim 13, wherein the substantially real-time delivery time information for at least one of the listed sellers comprises an estimated delivery time determined based on one or more actual delivery times for the listed seller within a predetermined time period preceding the request.

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15. The software of Claim 13, wherein the substantially real-time delivery time information for at least one of the listed sellers comprises a recent actual delivery time for the listed seller.

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16. The software of Claim 13, further operable to rank the listed sellers according to at least the substantially real-time delivery time information for each listed seller.

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17. The software of Claim 13, wherein:
the one or more databases contain preference information for the buyer; and
the software is further operable to generate the list according to the preference information for the buyer, the list excluding any sellers for which the pricing information or the substantially real-time delivery time information does not satisfy the preference information for the buyer.

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18. The software of Claim 13, further operable to initiate communication to the buyer of a suggested alternative food item available from one or more of the sellers, along with the pricing information and substantially real-time delivery time information for the alternative food item for each of these sellers, if the substantially real-time delivery time information for one or more of the listed sellers exceeds a threshold.

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19. The software of Claim 13, wherein the availability information for at least one of the sellers comprises substantially real-time availability information reflecting a current shortage of one or more food items normally available from the seller.

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20. The software of Claim 13, wherein:
the one or more databases contain rating information for one or more of the sellers; and

the software is further operable to initiate communication to the buyer of the rating information for at least one listed seller in association with the pricing and substantially real-time delivery time information for the listed seller.

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21. The software of Claim 13, further operable to:
initiate communication of the list to the buyer;
receive from the buyer a selection of a particular listed seller; and
initiate the food order transaction with the particular listed seller in response to the selection.

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22. The software of Claim 13, further operable to select the particular listed seller automatically according to at least the substantially real-time delivery time information for all of the listed sellers.

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23. A system for brokering food order transactions among a plurality of unaffiliated sellers, comprising:

means for storing:

delivery information associated with each of a plurality of buyers;

5 availability information identifying food items available from each of a plurality of unaffiliated sellers;

pricing information for the food items available from each seller; and

10 delivery information for each seller comprising a delivery area for the seller and substantially real-time delivery time information for the seller based at least in part on a current order backlog for the seller;

means for receiving a request for at least one food item from a buyer;

15 means for generating a list of one or more sellers of the requested food item according to a comparison of the requested food item with the availability information for each seller and a comparison of the delivery information for the buyer with the delivery area of each seller, the list reflecting the pricing information for the requested food item for each listed seller and the substantially real-time delivery time information for each listed seller; and

20 means for initiating a food order transaction concerning the requested food item with a particular listed seller selected from the list.

24. A method of brokering food order transactions among a plurality of unaffiliated sellers, comprising:

receiving a request for at least one food item from a buyer;

accessing one or more databases containing:

5 delivery information for the buyer;

availability information identifying food items available from each of a plurality of unaffiliated sellers;

pricing information for the food items available from each seller; and

10 delivery information for each seller comprising a delivery area for the seller and substantially real-time delivery time information for the seller based at least in part on a current order backlog for the seller;

generating a list of one or more sellers of the requested food item according to a comparison of the requested food item with the availability information for each seller and a comparison of the delivery information for the buyer with the delivery
15 area of each seller, the list reflecting the pricing information for the requested food item for each listed seller and the substantially real-time delivery time information for each listed seller; and

initiating a food order transaction concerning the requested food item with a particular listed seller selected from the list.

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25. The method of Claim 24, wherein the buyer delivery information is selected from the group consisting of a buyer area code, a buyer city, a buyer zip code, and a buyer street address.

25 26. The method of Claim 24, wherein the pricing information for at least one of the food items reflects a currently available special offer for the food item.

27. The method of Claim 24, wherein the substantially real-time delivery time information for at least one of the listed sellers comprises an estimated delivery time determined based on one or more actual delivery times for the listed seller within a predetermined time period preceding the request.

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28. The method of Claim 24, wherein the substantially real-time delivery time information for at least one of the listed sellers comprises a recent actual delivery time for the listed seller.

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29. The method of Claim 24, further comprising ranking the listed sellers according to at least the substantially real-time delivery time information for each listed seller.

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30. The method of Claim 24, wherein:
the one or more databases contain preference information for the buyer; and
the method further comprises generating the list according to the preference information for the buyer, the list excluding any sellers for which the pricing information or the substantially real-time delivery time information does not satisfy the preference information for the buyer.

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31. The method of Claim 24, further comprising communicating to the buyer a suggested alternative food item available from one or more of the sellers, along with the pricing information and substantially real-time delivery time information for the alternative food item for each of these sellers, if the substantially real-time delivery time information for one or more of the listed sellers exceeds a threshold.

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32. The method of Claim 24, wherein the availability information for at least one of the sellers comprises substantially real-time availability information reflecting a current shortage of one or more food items normally available from the seller.

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33. The method of Claim 24, wherein:
the one or more databases contain rating information for one or more of the sellers; and

the method further comprises communicating to the buyer the rating
10 information for at least one listed seller in association with the pricing and substantially real-time delivery time information for the listed seller.

34. The method of Claim 24, further comprising:
communicating the list to the buyer;
15 receiving from the buyer a selection of a particular listed seller; and
initiating the food order transaction with the particular listed seller in response to the selection.

35. The method of Claim 24, further comprising selecting the particular
20 listed seller automatically according to at least the substantially real-time delivery time information for all of the listed sellers.